

PRESS RELEASE

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Conyers Introduces Resolution to Commemorate 50th Anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Decision

Congressman John Conyers, Jr., issued the following statement regarding the introduction of a bipartisan resolution to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the *Brown v. Board* decision:

“*Brown v. Board* is the most important civil rights case in our nation’s history. In this decision, the United States Supreme Court declared, “in the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.” It was *Brown* that reversed *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the 1896 case that read the 14th amendment as permitting “separate but equal” facilities, and sanctioned the notorious Jim Crow laws.

In a true testament to the leadership of Chief Justice Warren, the decision came down unanimously in 1954. However, the decision was not readily or easily accepted, particularly in the South. Eighty six Southern Congressmen declared their opposition to the opinion in the infamous “Southern Manifesto.” It was still unsafe for African American children to attend white schools, and it took federal troops to open the school doors in Little Rock, Arkansas and several other Southern States.

While *Brown* was by its terms limited to the field of education, it paved the way for desegregation of beaches, buses, hotels, restaurants, and other public facilities. It took scores of additional lawsuits, civil disobedience by people like Rosa Park, the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, and the Civil Rights laws of the 1960's before integration began in earnest in our nation. Eventually, even the Supreme Court became integrated, when 13 years after *Brown*, the same person who argued the case before the Court – Thurgood Marshall – was appointed to the Supreme Court.

I wish I could say that victory has been complete, but we all know it has not. When we tried to increase integration in my own state of Michigan by bussing students across district lines, from cities to suburbs, we were blocked by the Supreme Court in the 1974 case of *Milliken vs. Bradley*.

In the 2001-2002 school year, the Civil Rights Project found that the average African American attended a school where minorities formed almost 70% of the student body. The average Latino school child attended a school that was 71% minority. By contrast, the average white student attended a school where whites composed 79% of the student body. By many counts our schools are more segregated today than they were 20 years ago.

These differences translate into inferior performance. In 2003, the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that 60% of African American fourth graders were not reading at a fourth grade level, nearly three times as many as white fourth graders.

It is because of such ongoing disparities that this resolution calls upon Congress to do more than celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the *Brown* decision by noting its historical significance. This resolution asks Congress to renew its commitment to continuing and building on the legacy of *Brown* with a pledge to acknowledge and address the modern day disparities that perpetuate a separate and unequal society.”